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ABSTRACT

Evaluation of student work in the visual arts is a mystery for many not involved in the process of creating and teaching art. Even for those experienced in teaching visual arts, the process of evaluation is often too subjective and lacking in formative feedback for the student. This paper describes how Process Portfolios along with clearly defined assignment objectives and expectations can help improve the evaluation of student work, and ultimately the work itself. Process Portfolios are tools that can provide the instructor with valuable information which can be used to offer formative evaluation of individual students. (Author/LB)

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Process Portfolios as a Means for Formative and Summative Evaluation of Student Work in the Visual Arts.

by John H. Walker

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Process portfolios as a means for formative and sumative evaluation of student work in the visual arts.

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ABSTRACT

Evaluation of student work in the visual arts is a mystery for many not involved in the process of the creation and teaching of art. Even for those experienced in teaching visual arts, the process of evaluation is often too subjective and lacking in formative feedback for the student. This paper describes how Process Portfolios along with clearly defined assignment objectives and expectations can help improve the evaluation of student work, and ultimately the work itself. Process Portfolios are also tools that can provide the instructor with valuable information which can be used to offer formative evaluation of individual students.

The type of problems

Graphic design problems are best described as closed, with open solutions. This means that there are specific requirements to be met in order for the final solution to be successful, yet there may be several possible solutions to the problem (Wakefield, 1992.) This does not mean, however, that all of the possible solutions solve the problem in the same way or with the same degree of effectiveness.

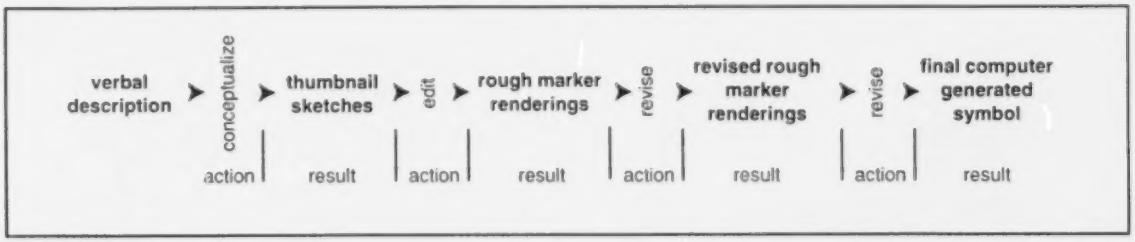
The course

The work presented here is from a college-level intermediate graphic design course. The particular focus of this course is creative problem solving and the graphic design process. This course usually has an enrollment of twelve to fifteen students per section.

The design process

To effectively and creatively solve graphic design problems it is important that two objectives be met: 1.) explore as many solutions to the problem as possible and 2.) edit, evaluate and refine those solutions in a sequence of steps. This sequence of steps is called the graphic design process (Arnston, 1998.) The reasoning supporting the first objective is that most often the first solutions one generates are likely to be the first ones that others would also arrive at and, therefore, are that least original (Oldach, 1995.) It is also important to explore ideas that might not otherwise be considered (deBono, 1970.) Even when a high number of possible solutions are developed, following through with the graphic design process is vital to the successful development and execution of those solutions.

The graphic design process includes several steps: 1.) research, 2.) thumbnail sketches, 3.) roughs, 4.) comprehensive layouts and, 5.) final production (Arnston, 1998.)

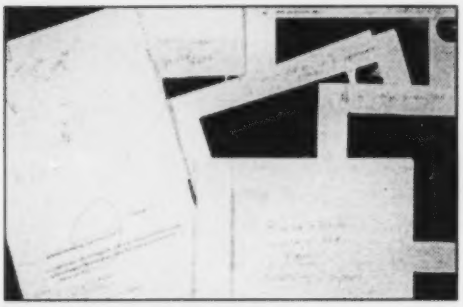


The design process.

What is a Process Portfolio

A Process Portfolio is the entire collection of work done on an assignment leading up to, and including, the final solution to the project. It is submitted to the instructor by the student at the time the assignment is due. A Process Portfolio may include, but not be limited to, writings,

concept maps, thumbnail sketches, rough sketches, computer generated roughs and the final solution to the given problem. Since each assignment may require steps and activities that are exclusive to that particular assignment, the content of the Process Portfolio may vary from assignment to assignment.



Samples of Process Portfolios to be shown in slide form.

How Process Portfolios work

By using Process Portfolios, an instructor is able to evaluate a student's understanding of and effort in the design process separately from the final product. The instructor is also able to include evaluation of other steps and aspects critical to that particular assignment. These steps can only be objectively evaluated by closely inspecting the work of each student. The Process Portfolio provides the instructor with the necessary information to offer more objective and accurate feedback to the student. The evaluation is reported back to the student by using a rubric which reflects each of the important aspects of the process of creation of the final piece of art as well as an evaluation of the final design itself.

The Process Portfolio will only be an effective evaluation tool if the specific objectives for each step in the creative process are clearly articulated to the students and the importance of each step is emphasized. As mentioned earlier, one of the primary focuses of this course is the graphic design process. The instructor should emphasize the importance of that process by making the connection between the success of the final design and the steps which are necessary to take in order to get to a successful conclusion. The Process Portfolio helps to place

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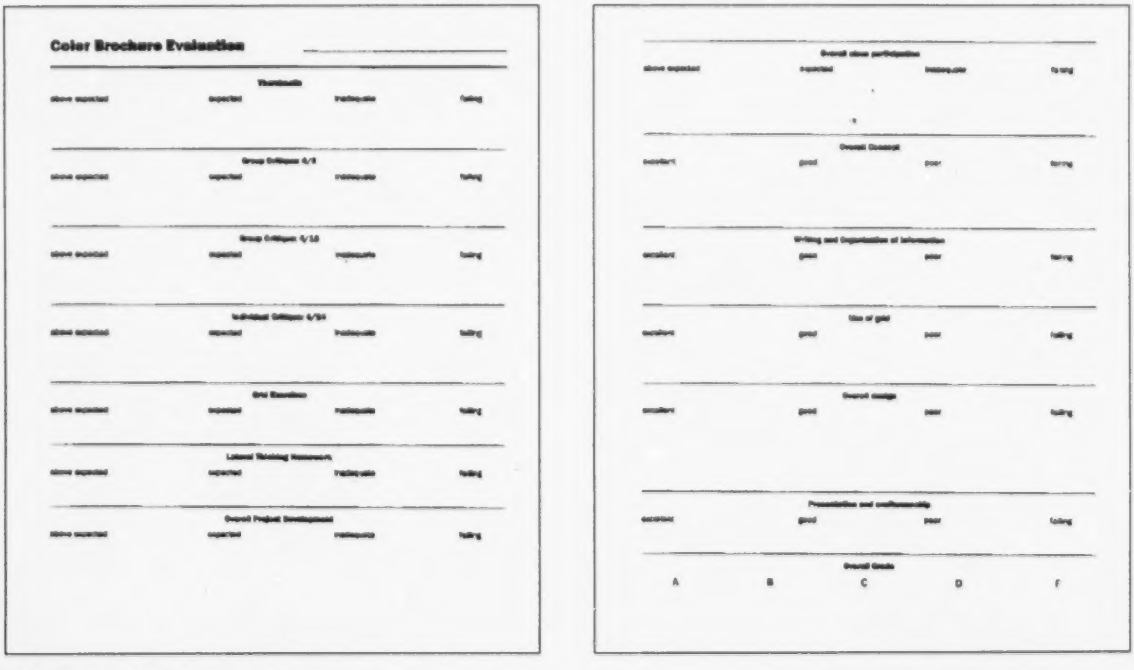
the emphasis on the process by making it an essential element in the evaluation of the student work.

The Assignment

Described here is one particular assignment and the approach to evaluation of the completed work. It is the final assignment in the course. In this particular assignment the students are to write and design an eight-page brochure. The theme of the brochure is color. The learning objectives of this assignment are many. Including:

1.) research and writing,
2.) learn and use the concepts of "Lateral Thinking,"
3.) develop a further understanding of "Concept Mapping,"
4.) practice the use of combining words and images to create an original and unified message,
5.) learn and apply basic principles of effective multi-page layout,
6.) learn and use grid systems for page layout,
7.) continuing from the previous graphic design class, knowledge of computer applications, specifically QuarkXpress.



Rubric for eight-page brochure.

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In addition to the steps in the design process, students are required to complete several other tasks on the way to completion of the assignment. It is important that each of these steps be completed on schedule and, in many cases, in a prescribed order. The items evaluated fall into three categories, 1.) process, 2.) class participation and, 3.) final solution.

Records of students participation at critical stages of the creative process, particularly the thumbnail stage, first group critique, second group critique and individual critiques are kept by the instructor. Each step in the process then becomes part of an element on the rubric. When the assignment is completed, the students submit the final design with the Process Portfolio.

How Process Portfolios aid evaluation

Sumative evaluations

Like most visual art assignments, graphic design problems are evaluated by means of a critical and often somewhat subjective analysis of the finished product by the instructor. This analysis is usually based upon educated and informed visual and conceptual criteria established by the instructor. Although this method alone may provide an accurate evaluation of the final work submitted, it assumes a similar effort and participation in the process of creation among all of the students. Furthermore, it is more likely that with this method of evaluation of student work that too much emphasis is placed on the end product of student learning by the instructor. Since information about student learning is limited to only what the instructor can determine from the formal and conceptual aspects of the final piece, the grade given that piece is based, to a great degree, on matters of taste and formal preferences - preferences not necessarily shared by the student.

Because with a Process Portfolio the student's entire working process is evaluated, the grade given to that student is based less on the final piece and more so on the quality and volume of the creative exploration. This is not to say that with a Process Portfolio total objectivity is achieved, but rather that less subjective criteria plays an important role in the evaluation criteria thus making the overall grading process less subjective and mysterious.

Additionally, the instructor finds it easier to justify the grade given on a assignment when he or she can point to strengths and weaknesses in the student's process and how the student's final product and grade were affected by their process.

Formative evaluation

When pointing out the strengths and weaknesses in the student's process, the instructor reinforces the importance of proper follow-through with the design process demonstrating to the student the importance the instructor places on the development of ideas and the learning that occurs in the process of creation. The instructor is able to provide constructive feedback to the student regarding where time, effort and attention should be focused in order to improve the student's working process and ultimately, the final product. Students are also able to reflect more thoughtfully on their own work habits and learn from their strengths and weaknesses in the design process.

Another problem encountered by many visual arts instructors is that of motivating the students to explore as many possible solutions to a problem as possible. Many students lack the self-discipline necessary to work through the large number of possible solutions required to develop an effective and original solutions to problems of this nature. It is not uncommon for students to approach graphic design assignments with the attitude that if only one final solution is needed then only a few possibilities need to be explored. It is easy for a student to become "married" to a solution developed early in the process and then to defend its viability without seriously evaluating its effectiveness and originality or considering alternative and possibly better solutions. Because students know from the beginning of the assignment that all of their work produced toward a final solution will be be evaluated, they are more likely to take the process of creation more seriously.

Beyond the evaluation of the assignment at hand, the Process Portfolio provides the instructor with the opportunity to assess other important aspects of the class as well. When portfolios from several projects are evaluated, the instructor is able to identify tendencies of individual students, such as lack of development at certain stages in the process. The Process

Portfolio also allows the instructor to assess the success of the assignment and his or her teaching effectiveness. When the instructor sees the portfolios from an entire class or classes of students he or she is able to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the assignment and to identify trends among the portfolios which may indicate aspects of the assignment that needs improvement.

Process Portfolios also helps the instructor identify cases of plagiarism. Because students must submit all of their work, sketches that are conspicuous in their appearance - those which are clearly either out of context within the flow of development or are executed at a higher level than the other work in the portfolio - may cause the instructor to question the origin of the sketch.

Conclusion

The importance of the work presented in this paper lies in its detailed description of an evaluation process which is certainly applicable to instruction in the visual arts; but also has implications in many other disciplines, particularly those disciplines involving creative problem solving. The Process Portfolio attempts to measure and evaluate the degree of effort and understanding of each student in the process of creative problem solving. Use of it reinforces the belief that real learning occurs only when the student is fully engaged in the active process of learning. This is especially true in graphic design where real success is not measured by the mere completion of a project but rather by the creativity and originality of the solution to the problem given.

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